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An Alliance for Tolerance Appeals for Openness toward Foreigners (October 31, 1991)

To counter growing resentment against newcomers, an “alliance against xenophobia and racism” composed of churches, trade unions, business associations, organizations, sports clubs, and youth groups from Lower Saxony appealed for tolerance under the motto, “Without foreigners we’d be all alone.”

“Without Foreigners We’d Be All Alone”

Churches, trade unions, business associations, the state athletic association, the state youth council, and other organizations in Lower Saxony came together on Tuesday in Hanover to form an “alliance against xenophobia and racism.” They agreed on a joint appeal, “Without foreigners we’d be all alone,” which will be printed in all Lower Saxon newspapers this coming weekend.

The local offices for foreigner affairs in Lower Saxony, the state student council, and welfare associations such as the Red Cross and the Workers’ Welfare Association are also participating in the alliance, but the political parties are not, and this caused a dispute prior to its founding.

The state commissioner for foreigner affairs, Gabriele Erpenbeck (CDU) – in agreement with politicians in the red-green* government of the state of Lower Saxony – deliberately chose not to invite the political parties for well-founded reasons: Policy relating to foreigners [*Ausländerpolitik*] had become the dominant campaign issue in the lead-up to the Lower Saxon local elections on October 6.

Some candidates’ slogans had played a significant role in fueling xenophobic sentiments. The right-wing extremist party, “The Republicans” [“Die Republikaner”], which focused entirely on this issue, won seats in local parliaments wherever they competed in Lower Saxony.

After the local elections, the government and opposition factions in the Lower Saxon state parliament were still unable to settle a common position despite increasing acts of violence against foreigners. In view of these conflicts, the commissioner for foreigner affairs chose to

* A red-green government is a coalition government between the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Green Party – eds.

leave the political parties out of the alliance for the time being – despite harsh protest from the opposition parties.

After the alliance was formed on Tuesday, the founders immediately issued an invitation to all social groups that had not yet joined and requested their participation. The appeal is directed to “all of the people in our federal state who are prepared to work for good neighborly relations and peaceful coexistence.” These people are being called upon to actively contribute to protecting foreigners and isolating those who threaten people with aggression and violence.

Violence against foreigners violates human dignity and damages the foundation of a democratic and open-minded society. Molotov cocktails thrown at foreigners “hit all of us,” wrote the alliance.

The appeal continues: “Foreign families who have already lived here for a long time and have contributed to our prosperity are part of us. We have become indispensable to each other. Refugees who seek asylum here have a right to have their dignity respected and to receive a fair hearing. Disrespect for foreigners and violence against them make our own world foreign to us. We are just as dependent on other people as they are on us. Without foreigners we’d be all alone.”

The “alliance against xenophobia and racism” doesn’t want to stop at a one-time appeal. As the state commissioner on foreigner affairs, [in her role] as coordinator of the alliance, has already announced, a poster competition for students at Lower Saxon art academies is already under way, among other initiatives.

Paper companies, printers, and the billboard rental company Deutsche Städereklame have already agreed to cover the costs of the poster project. An exhibition of all the submitted designs is also planned. A large rally is supposed to be held in Hanover in several weeks. The organizations in the alliance have agreed to ask their local chapters throughout the entire state to initiate joint local activities.

Source: Eckhart Spoo, “Without Foreigners We’d Be All Alone” [“Ohne Fremde sind wir allein”], *Frankfurter Rundschau*, October 30, 1991.

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